

**TESTIMONY OF ROBERT MARVINNEY, STATE GEOLOGIST AND DIRECTOR
MAINE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
MAINE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY**

**NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST
L.D. 1719**

**AN ACT TO IMPROVE GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM DATA
ACQUISITION AND MAINTENANCE**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY**

DATE OF HEARING: May 21, 2019

PRESENTED BY: Senator Black

Senator Dill, Representative Hickman, and members of the Committee, I am Robert Marvinney, State Geologist and Director of the Maine Geological Survey (MGS) of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. I am testifying neither for nor against LD 1719.

The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) is a strong advocate for geographic data and its application to business functions within the many programs of the Department, within other state agencies, within Maine's communities and businesses, and by Maine citizens. A rigorously developed and maintained system of geographic data is an indispensable tool for greatly improved analyses of complex natural resource issues, and a tool that produces efficiencies and reduces costs.

To provide some context to the bill before you, it is worthwhile to briefly review the history of geographic information systems (GIS) in state government. The Maine Office of Geographic Information Systems (MeGIS) had its origins in the former Department of Conservation (DOC) nearly 30 years ago, due to DOC's critical need to organize, maintain, and utilize geographic information to address numerous natural resource issues. At the time, it was fully funded through the DOC budget, but many other state had similar needs and were contemplating establishing parallel systems. Various permutations of the GIS Steering Committee, GIS Executive Council, and other broadly representative stakeholder groups established governance and a strategic plan for the system, but the system remained mostly funded through DOC. With the economic downturn of the early 1990s, funding for MeGIS was cut from the Department budget in 1994 and a fee-for-services funding mechanism was adopted, which collected funding from all Departments using the system.

At the same time, MeGIS was moved to the Office of Information Technology. These activities solved one problem but created another. One of the concerns with housing the State's GIS office within one natural resource agency had been that the needs for GIS extended well beyond DOC. A certain amount of dynamic tension existing around the management and priorities of the system while at DOC. The state agency GIS user community felt that relocating MeGIS to a neutral agency such as OIT would give all users equal voice in its oversight.

But the problem with the fee-for-services model was that only state agencies were paying these fees, while the GIS data were being used broadly outside of state government – by municipalities, businesses, and

citizens. To address this, the Maine Library of Geographic Information (GeoLibrary) was established in 2001 to bring together the broader GIS community to set priorities for and to advocate for additional financial resources to support data acquisition and maintenance. The GeoLibrary Board was established as the governing body to oversee GeoLibrary operations and procurement; establish and maintain standards, rules and policies regarding data to be placed in the Geolibrary; foster ongoing coordination among GIS stakeholders; set priorities; approve expenditures of funds; seek partnerships; resolve disputes; conduct studies; and report annually to the Legislature. The GeoLibrary and its Board have been fairly successful in advocating for bonds to support the acquisition of priority data.

Over time, the Maine Office of Information Technology has faced constant downward pressure on budgets and maintaining the GeoLibrary, when faced with all the other demands on OIT, simply has not been a priority. But let's be clear that through this bill, OIT would still maintain the hardware and software resources necessary for GIS. The oversight, management, and promotion of GIS would shift to the natural resource user community through the DACF.

Is this shift in administrative oversight the solution? Perhaps it is part of a solution. The more significant need is to ensure steady, sustainable funding to ensure that the GeoLibrary has the financial resources necessary to carry out its mission.